

CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND BRIEFING

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT BUDGET 2011/2012 – WHAT IT MEANS FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

Overview

The Scottish Parliament has agreed the Scottish Government's budget for the coming financial year (2011-12). The block grant from Westminster has been reduced substantially (by £1.3 billion), resulting in the biggest decrease in UK funding coming to Scotland since devolution. This will mean that many services and supports funded by the Scottish Government will suffer budget cuts, though certain areas of expenditure have been protected or even increased.

Health service budgets have received real terms protection, while local government has experienced approximately a 2.6% reduction from the Scottish Government. The full impact of this, in service terms, will only be known once all local authorities have set their own budgets. The Scottish Government has agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA), through the Single Outcome Agreements, that local authorities have an obligation to delivering three 'flagship' social policies – the Early Years Framework, Equally Well and Achieving Our Potential – as well as the Curriculum for Excellence.

How these key policies will be delivered, monitored and measured are, in the first instance, decisions to be made at local level. And, the 2.6% revenue decrease does *not* exempt local authorities from their fulfilling their statutory duties, e.g. to implement the Additional Support for Learning Act.

At national level, the Scottish Government's budget was passed with the support of other political parties in return for the inclusion of a number of additional measures. Money for these additions has been found from contingency sources. They have not, therefore, diverted funds from the original budget commitments.

The main aspects of the overall budget that are likely to impact on children, young people and their families are:

- The UK reduction in funding for Scotland is £1.3 billion
- Around £450 million will be cut from the Scottish Government grant to local authorities – although the proportion will continue to be one-third of the budget.
- Council tax will remain frozen for a further year
- Health service expenditure will be protected in real terms with frontline services to be prioritised
- The balance of NHS provision is to be redesigned, placing more emphasis on primary care
- Pupil/teacher ratios in early primary school will remain unchanged
- Jobs will be found for all probationer teachers
- An additional £5 million is being provided to third sector organisations to support early years and early intervention services
- £42 million will be allocated to dealing with problems arising from alcohol misuse
- NHS prescription charges will be abolished as planned
- Capital building programmes will be affected, including new school provision -- as £800 million of the reduction will affect the capital programme. However, the new children's hospital in Edinburgh will still go ahead
- £600 million is being invested in affordable housing
- Simplification and greater efficiency in public services are intended to achieve a 3% saving across the board
- Expenditure on services for drug users will be maintained
- Public sector pay restraint will be exercised, with some protection for lower paid workers
- 1,200 additional college places and 1,500 additional apprenticeships will be provided

How will these cuts affect children?

As the detail of local authority budgets is still being worked out, and priorities will vary from authority to authority, it is not as yet possible to specify the impact across Scotland. Some commitments, such as class sizes, are already part of the Concordat between councils and the Scottish Government.

Other funds with a specific purpose (such as the £5 million for early intervention) will, of course, be directed to that area of service. Local authorities have indicated that there will inevitably be significant impact on services, though most aspire to protect frontline provision. The major area of reduction in most councils will be staffing; which, in turn, is likely to lead to a contraction of public services. Councils have also, in general, pledged to ensure that services to the most vulnerable are sustained. However, with thousands of job losses inevitable, there will undoubtedly be severe and sustained effects on individuals, families and

communities. Glasgow City Council, for example, intends to shed 2,600 staff over the next three years.

Following the Scottish Parliament's decision, a number of councils have now agreed a budget settlement. While children's services have received some measure of protection compared to other council activities, it is clear that already decisions are being made that will inevitably have adverse consequences. Included in the announcements made by local authorities thus far are:

- Aberdeen intends to reduce by one-third the number of classroom assistants
- East Ayrshire is cutting breakfast club provision
- Shetland will close six schools

While other areas of service such as the arts, libraries, parks and public space maintenance feature more prominently in targeted reductions than schools or social care services, it is important to remember how these services contribute to the quality of life for children, families and communities. It is also true that in most authorities, education and social care are by far the biggest areas of expenditure.

It is not yet evident whether and how the protection of NHS Budgets and the shift towards primary rather than reactive care will affect services for children.

Children in Scotland will be closely monitoring the situation as more detail emerges, and will update our membership regularly.

Marion Macleod
11 February 2011

Children in Scotland is the national umbrella agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 400 members, including 90% of Scottish local authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.